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Psychiatry/psychology and linguistics meeting in a psychoanalytical and developmental psychology framework¹

At different stages of her clinical and scholarly career, Sabina Spielrein worked together with the most influential figures of her age and field: Jung, Freud, and then Piaget. It would be wrong and unfair to assume, however, that Spielrein was nothing more than a “follower of geniuses”. What makes her perspective unique is indeed the very fact that she creatively carried classic theses further, complementing and sometimes even criticising them. The assumption that the connection between Spielrein and the “masters” was unidirectional is also mistaken. Spielrein’s inspiring influence – though implicitly rather than explicitly – can be felt on Jung’s, Freud’s and, most pronouncedly, on Piaget’s work. In my paper, I will illustrate this with the example of her cooperation with Piaget, going back to the origins of their collaboration.

Sabina Spielrein lived in Geneva between September 1920 and May 1923, working at the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute (Richebächer, 2005, 361.).² Looking at her biographical data, it is easy to see how inspiring this vibrant intellectual environment was for Spielrein’s fundamentally creative personality. She was active as a practising psychoanalyst, a researcher, and a participant in the academic scene (IPA congresses, Swiss Society for Psychoanalysis [Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Psychoanalyse], the psychoanalytic group of Geneva [Groupe Psychoanalytique] etc.) (Richebächer, op. cit., 219–239.).

Even more than biographical facts, the works she wrote in this period and later, upon returning to the Soviet Union but relying directly on her experiences in Geneva, proves this fact. These studies (including three papers of key importance), almost

¹ The study was translated by Rita Béres-Deák.

² In my paper, I focus on Spielrein’s written work, so I only deal with biographical elements to the extent necessary to understand the context. Therefore, when mentioning biographical details, I only refer to one biography, that of Sabine Richebächer (Richebächer, 2005). This work was also the starting point of my philological inquiry. With regard to the historical context of Spielrein’s thinking about language, I also relied on a single source: Willem J. M. Levelt’s *A History of Psycholinguistics* (Levelt, 2013). The direct quotes from the *Papa-mama study* come from Barbara Wharton’s translation (Wharton, 2005, 289–306.). In the paper, both the original German text and the translation by Wharton are referred to. Other direct quotes – given the lack of an authentic English translation – were translated by Rita Béres-Deák.

without exception, examine the development of thought mechanisms and language, and their content builds on one another. Therefore, in my paper, I will use the chronologically first key study: “Die Entstehung der kindlichen Worte Papa und Mama – Einige Betrachtungen über verschiedene Stadien in der Sprachentwicklung” (“The Origin of the Child’s Words Papa and Mama. Some Observations on the Different Stages in Language Development”, Spielrein, 1922b/2005) to demonstrate what Spielrein thought about the development of conceptual mechanisms and language, the relationship between thought and language. The theories that form the basis of these paper were presented by Spielrein at the 1920 IPA congress in the Hague (Spielrein, 1920); the written version was published in *Imago* in 1922 (Spielrein, 1922b)³.

The author was interested in questions of linguistics all her life (cf. Faluvégi, 2018), but of all her work, this is the one most focused on linguistics: she examines the origin and development of the sounds of the language. To illustrate this, she outlines the phonetic development of the sounds *m* and *p* and connects them to considerations of psychoanalysis and developmental psychology.

As a central question of this paper, Spielrein asks: “How does it happen that in children all races the same comparable terms for father and mother are found (papa and mama)?” (Spielrein, 1922b, 353., Wharton, 2005, 295.) She immediately attaches another question to it: Why are the terms “mama” and “papa” likely to be the first words a child says? (op. cit.)

The formation of the sound repertoire

She proposes that the answer lies in the developmental history of the child’s sound repertoire, more specifically, that of the sounds *m* and *p*. She outlines four perspectives for this: a. phonetic b. physiological c. biological and d. psychological.

a) The phonetic aspect

Here Spielrein focuses on the place where the sounds are produced, specifically, that they are both labials (op. cit., 349., 351., Wharton, op. cit., 292., 293.). The reason why these should be the sounds that appear first could be explained by physiology.

b) The physiological aspect

In terms of the origin and development of sounds, in Spielrein’s opinion, physiology determines how much effort is needed to produce a sound, i.e. how “comfortable” it is to make it. Here the starting point is de Buffon’s “Loi du moindre effort” (the law of the least effort) applied to phonology. This states that the first sounds that appear in a child’s sound repertoire are the ones whose articulation needs the least effort: primarily, labials.

³ Spielrein’s work was the main inspiration for István Hollós’s fragment on language theory (Hollós, 1940). Hollós outlined the development of sounds in a stricter psychoanalytical interpretation than Spielrein. For a linguistic overview of this work, see Faluvégi, 2017.

However, based on her own experiences and the observation of contemporary and slightly earlier researchers of child language development (more on this later), Spielrein has always challenged the overarching explanatory power of the least physical effort. She claims that the child's sound repertoire does include sounds that take more effort and are "more uncomfortable" to make (*k*, *r*, *g* etc.) but the child substitutes these with ones that are easier to make (especially labials [*m*, *p*, *b*] or sometimes dentals [*n*, *t*, *d*]) (op. cit., 351–353., Wharton, op. cit., 293–295.). She describes this phenomenon (with reference to her predecessors and contemporaries) as a physical preference (*physiologische Bevorzugung*).

c) The biological aspect

Spielrein's argument in the article does not only focus on the origin and development of sounds, but more broadly on the biological framework of the origin and development of language. The most important elements of this are the following:

- the paper approaches the origin and development of language from the physiology and psychology of instincts. This is not surprising for a scientist dedicated to psychoanalysis; it is, however, striking that – even though she attributes a key role to the act of suckling – she thinks that the attachment between mother and infant is just as important or even more. This is crucial to emphasise because researchers following in Spielrein's footsteps (Imre Hermann, Harlow, Bowlby, even up to the present day [Brock Kelcourse, 2019, 64.]) assume more and more that the need to attachment is innate and instinctive (cf. Pléh, 2011, 49.);
- a central element of Spielrein's biological framework is its embeddedness in Darwin's evolutionary and Haeckel's biogenetic theories, which is typical for the age. Haeckel claims that ontogenesis is a repetition of phylogenesis, and he had extended this theory to explain the child's mental development. Haeckel's and Darwin's theories probably entered linguistic thinking thanks to August Schleicher: the child's language development (ontogenesis) recapitulates the language development of the human race (phylogenesis) (Sulloway, 1983, 245–282.; Levelt, 2013, 36–40., 99.). This idea may have been the origin of the notion, central to Spielrein's whole oeuvre, that by studying the language of children, we can deduce the basic principles of the origin of language and the development of thought;
- given the primacy of the biogenetic approach, it is not unexpected that in her theory about the origin and development of language, Spielrein assumed a development from gestures to sounds (Levelt, op. cit., 23., 116–123., 165–208.; Faluvégi, op. cit., 34., 42.).

As a slight detour but related to the above, it is worth mentioning that researchers describing Spielrein's work in detail, or even only in passing, almost always emphasise her strong biologism (Sulloway, op. cit., 427.; Brock Kelcourse, op. cit.; Naszkowska, 2019, 120.). However, they usually stay on the level of generalisation, mentioning names, and rarely do they specify examples of this biologism (except for Brock Kelcourse).

Sulloway mentions a quotation by Freud from 1911, which explicitly criticises Spielrein's biologism (op. cit.). Freud claims that psychoanalysis has legitimacy in itself; it does not require the "support" of other sciences.

Naszkowska mentions evolutionism and names of authors related to it (Darwin, Mendel and Weismann) (op. cit.). Given that in Spielrein's work, we can see the encounter of Darwin and Mendel, we might even suggest that Spielrein foresaw the modern evolutionary synthesis. (Of course, given her awareness of and openness to new ideas, it is possible that she knew about neo-Darwinist approaches.)

Her open-mindedness was not limited to biology but manifested itself towards natural sciences in general. This is also reflected in her terminology (e.g. introducing the more mathematical-physical-geographical term (*Ton*)*inklination* for "tone, pitch" instead of the more widespread German terms *Tonfall*, *Intonation* [op. cit., 346., Wharton, op. cit., 290.]). She liked to illustrate psychological and linguistic phenomena with the laws of physics or genetics. Of course, this is not only a result of her erudition and openness but also of a general tendency in classical psychoanalysis to use the terminology of natural sciences for naming its concepts.

d) *The psychological aspect (developmental psychology, methodology)*

The *Papa-mama* paper examines the origin and development of the sounds *m* and *p* in the framework of the child's conceptual development, and thus connects language and psychological development. The explanation probably lies (among other things) in the history of science: until the turn of the 19th and 20th century, studying child language was a field of developmental psychology (Levelt, op. cit., 93., 107.). It became an individual scientific field only around the turn of the century, and one of the key agents in this process was Wilhelm Ament, who also inspired Spielrein in several respects. In 1899, Ament wrote a study written under the professional guidance of Külpe, entitled *Die Entwicklung von Sprechen und Denken beim Kinde* (The development of speech and thinking in children), which focused on the grammar of child language, and in which he notes that:

- There is a need for a child language science that is independent of child psychology and developmental psychology;
- This new science must be practised by linguists;
- This science needs its own methodology and concepts (Levelt, op. cit.).

The methodology was more or less already there. The preferred method for studying child language around the turn of the century and in the following decades was diary writing: researchers usually observed their own child(ren) or child-aged relatives. Ament and Spielrein were both diligent diary writers: Spielrein continuously documented the linguistic production of her first daughter (born in 1913) and used it to illustrate her theories on the development of thinking and language in almost all her work.

In addition, Spielrein was also a pioneer in observing children: as early as 1912, she published a comprehensive study, which included child observation (*Beiträge zur Kenntnis der kindlichen Seele* (Contributions to an Understanding of the Child's

Mind), and until 1920, she wrote about ten other papers of varying lengths in which child observation (usually that of her own and related children) serves as a basis for dream analysis, commentaries on the development of thinking or on pathological psychic functioning.

Her outline of the origin and development of the sounds *m* and *p* from these four aspects is partly based on her own ideas, partly on the results of previous and contemporary child language researchers. Spielrein's real "added value" is the notion of "psychological preference" (*psychologische Bevorzugung*) (op. cit., 353., Wharton, op. cit., 295.). Before presenting this idea, however, I will take a glimpse at the ideas of some of Spielrein's predecessors and contemporaries to illustrate why Spielrein's arguments relying on their accomplishments are also interesting.

Spielrein and previous/contemporary research on child language

Like all Spielrein's papers, *Papa-mama* also proves her deep knowledge of the relevant professional literature. Using Levelt's comprehensive and extremely detailed handbook of the history of psycholinguistics as a reference (as we already have), we can see that Spielrein had a thorough knowledge of the contemporary literature on the origin and development of language. This enabled her to "embed" her ideas into the mainstream theories of the day, and to develop the notions of these authors further.

As we have already mentioned, studying the development of child language became an independent and immediately blossoming field of science in the early years of the 20th century. Those (also) studying child language formed their own community (Levelt, op. cit., 108.), and this had several advantages. Scholars came from different sciences: there were psychologists, pedagogy experts, special education teachers, physicians and linguists. These varied special fields resulted in a variety of perspectives, a kind of multidisciplinary approach. Another advantage was the fact that there was no single centre or school for the study of child language, but researchers came from various language backgrounds: German, English, Russian, French, Polish and Spanish. This was important partly because scholars were able to make observations in different languages and establish universal and individual tendencies. It was also important, however, because most works were also published in translation, becoming accessible for scholars not speaking the given language, and thus a multidisciplinary approach was coupled with international awareness. Here is a non-exhaustive list of six scholars who inspired Spielrein and who represent different fields and approaches.

a) Fritz Schultze (Spielrein, op. cit. 351., Wharton, op. cit., 293.): philosopher and educator. His study entitled *Die Sprache des Kindes* (The language of the child), published in 1880, is the first paper focusing exclusively on child language (Levelt, op. cit., 100.). He gives a detailed overview of children's sound development and the order in which the sounds appear. He claims that the determining factor in children's sound production is the law of least effort. What initiated a debate between him and his

colleagues (including Wundt and Spielrein) was his detailed theory for cases when a child is not yet capable to produce a specific sound. Based on his observations, he claims that in such cases the child (1) substitutes the sound (with the most closely related, but less strenuous one, e.g. uses *b* instead of *w*); (2) omits the sound (instead of *Grossmamma* says *Omamma*; (3) assimilates the sound he or she cannot produce (instead of *Topf* says *Tot*). (Schultze's examples, cited by Levelt, op. cit., 111.).

Spielrein, however, disagreed with Schultze. The gist of her criticism – which has been mentioned in relation to her physiological arguments – is that the child “is able” to produce a wide variety of sounds at an early age, but uses them selectively, giving preference to those requiring less physiological effort (op. cit., 351–352., Wharton, op. cit., 293–294.). Therefore, instead of the principle of least physical effort, she emphasises physical preference.

Curiously, Roman Jakobson uses a phonological approach but a similar starting point in criticising the principle of least physical effort when claiming that in the period of babbling, the only restrictions on sound formation are physiological; there is no system in the infant's “repertoire” of sounds or in the order of their appearance. Systemic acquisition comes later, when the child is already able to recognise phonological differentiation, and this is the key to language development (Jakobson, 1941; Levelt, op. cit. 352.).

b) William Preyer (Spielrein, op. cit., 351., Wharton, op. cit., 293.): physician. Spielrein only mentions him as one of the critics of Schultze and the principle of least physical effort. What makes Preyer special among the child language researchers of his age, and why I highlight his work, is his consistently medical approach to the child's acquisition of language. A determining element is trying to explain language acquisition starting from speech disorders: “every known form of adult speech disorder finds its complete reflexion in the child that learns to speak.” (Preyer, 1882, 375., cited in Levelt, op. cit., 101.). He based his theory on Broca's, Wernicke's and Lichtheim's localisation models, and interpreted language development as maturation of various centres and the connections between them (Levelt, op. cit., 102–103.).

c) Wilhelm Ament (Spielrein, op. cit., 351., 352., Wharton, op. cit., 293., 294.): psychologist. He was especially important for Spielrein because he was a consistent advocate of the physiological principle in language development, and Spielrein attributes to him the substitution of the principle of least physical effort with the idea of physical preference.

“Ament has already been mentioned here as the person who elevated the study of child language to an independent science, a student of Külpe, dedicated to keeping language diaries. In fact, it is his cooperation with the innovative Külpe that explains why the diary method was fundamental in the study of child language at the time. As the experimental study of children's thinking and language was not (yet) available, scholars saw diary documentation and the comparative analysis of

diary data as the adequately exact, scientifically founded method” (cf. Levelt, op. cit., 107–108.).

d) Wilhelm and Clara Stern (Spielrein, op. cit., 350., 355., 360–361., Wharton, op. cit., 293., 296., 300.): psychologists. Spielrein must have been familiar with the couple’s monograph *Die Kindersprache* (Child language), published in 1907, and she relied strongly on the Sterns’ diary data. However, the Sterns’ greatest influence on her is clearly their emphasis on affectivity/emotionality in language development. When Spielrein talks about how (in a psychoanalytical framework) development progresses from the affective/volitional to the objective/intellectual function, she cites the Sterns (op. cit. 355., Wharton, op. cit., 296.).

e) Hermann Gutzmann sen. (Spielrein, op. cit. 351., Wharton, op. cit., 293.): physician. He considered suckling as the starting point of the child’s language development, and as the key to the universality of the words, “mama” and “papa”.

“It is natural [...] that these first speech sounds lie in the first and second articulation system (here Gutzmann must have meant labials and dentals: *m, p, t, d* – K.F.): lips and the tip of the tongue are the parts which are prepared for articulation by suckling. For that reason the names of father and mother are similar in almost all languages, and very often the same.” (Cited in Spielrein, op. cit, emphasis added by Spielrein [Wharton, op. cit.].)

There is no indication as to which work of Gutzmann is cited, but we can see that emphasizing the activity of suckling is not an invention of psychoanalysis – K.F.).

Though Spielrein does not mention it and it is not important in relation to her point, Gutzmann – similarly to Preyer – also saw a connection between the child’s language development and adult language pathologies (cf. Levelt, op. cit., 108.).

f) Jules Ronjat (Spielrein, op. cit., 352., Wharton, op. cit., 294.): linguist. He focused on the language development of children in multilingual families, based on his experiences raising his own child (in a French-German bilingual home). He may have been important for Spielrein for two reasons. First, the role of a multilingual environment was relevant for her in relation to her own daughter, although she never discusses this aspect in her work. Second, Ronjat belonged to the Geneva circle of linguists; he lived and worked in Geneva until his death in 1925. Though we have no evidence for this, we can be almost sure that he and Spielrein, so open towards linguistics, must have known each other in person (cf. Levelt, op. cit., 318–319.).

To summarise: commonalities in the earlier and contemporary child language development researchers, whose work was processed and creatively further developed by Spielrein include:

- adherence to evolutionary and biogenetic principles;

- a not-yet-systematic examination of language (except the Sterns and Ament). Their main interest is the birth and development of sounds, which they regard as the “basis” of language, but problems of word formation and the development of word meanings also appear;
- however, the question of linguistic functions and the order of their progress (from emotional to intellectual) comes up as a recurring topic;
- the innate or non-innate nature of language (there is more support for innateness);
- working with a diary method.

Beyond these similarities, there tend to be differences between the representatives of different fields: physicians approach the study of child language from the perspective of pathologies, while psychologists, teachers and linguists lay more emphasis on other influencing factors (environment, emotional determination, individual differences).

All these characteristics are present in Spielrein’s thinking; moreover, she synthesised the medical and the psychological-pedagogical approaches, inasmuch as she also examined linguistic pathologies (she only touches upon this topic in the *Papa-mama* paper [cf. op. cit., 355., Wharton, op. cit., 296.]), but before and after that, she published several analyses of the thought mechanisms and language production of aphasics and psychiatric patients).

Spielrein’s innovation, the three stages of language and Piaget

All these have placed Spielrein into the mainstream of child language research. Her own unique contribution is the idea of psychological preference (*psychologische Bevorzugung*), which builds on her psychoanalytic knowledge: “Now I would like to place my ideas about psychological preference alongside these theories.” (op. cit., 353, Wharton, op. cit., 295.).

The main elements of the notion of psychological preference are as follows:

- it examines the child’s language development not only from a conceptual but also from an ego development perspective;
- the key to language development lies in the mother-infant relationship;
- in this relationship, the act of feeding has a determining role (which means that the sounds *m* and *p* are not only chosen because their place of articulation [the lips] makes them convenient);
- it determines the stages of language development based on the functional aspect of language, from a psychoanalytical perspective.⁴

⁴ To place Spielrein’s paper again in a historical context: some of her predecessors also talk about the stages of language development. In a study published in 1877, Adolf Kussmaul, a physician she also cites, established

Spielrein's psychoanalytic interpretation relies on Freud's dual principle of pleasure/reality. Self-development within the infant-mother relationship can be described as a path from the total realisation of the pleasure principle to the fulfilment of the reality principle. In the act of feeding, we can trace how the infant arrives step by step from the omnipotence of a dual unity with the mother to experiencing external reality. Spielrein presents this through the development of the sounds *m* and *p* and through the differentiation of three language stages: autistic, magical and social.

On the second page of the *Papa-mama* paper, we can already find a thought-provoking footnote: "We are on the point of saying that language originally exists for its own sake and develops only later into a social language intended for one's fellow beings" (op. cit., 346., Wharton, op. cit., 305). She then repeats this statement twice, as if she wanted the reader to memorise it (op. cit., 348., 353., Wharton, op. cit., 305., 295.), before she starts discussing the three stages. In the two other mentions, she also adds that language has no original communicative function. These statements are not only relevant for the *Papa-mama* study, and not only from a psychoanalytical perspective. Put in a broader context and discussed in more detail, they surface again in Spielrein's later Geneva papers focusing on her definition of language. However, in the *Papa-mama* study, this still purely psychoanalytical element is central to defining the three stages.

a) autistic stage: the infant lives in a dual unity with the mother, ignorant of the external world, realising the pleasure principle. The utterance and later perhaps repetition of the sounds *m* and *p* is reflexive. (Spielrein does not waste too many words on the vowels accompanying these two sounds; all she mentions is that usually, these are not *a* but more commonly labial *o* sounds [op. cit., 355., Wharton, op. cit., 296.]). The sound is linked to a physiological factor: eating and the accompanying movement. At this point, the sound and the action (eating) are still the same. As the action is accompanied by pleasant feelings (softness, warmth, satiation), after a while, the infant reproduces the same sounds again and again for his or her own pleasure. This way, the connection between action and sound becomes loose, and the sound slowly becomes capable of recalling the feelings connected to the action. The process continues in the magical phase. The sound reaction in the autistic phase is still for the infant himself or herself, serving and expressing his or her pleasure and comfort. It is not directed towards the outside world and does not communicate anything; it merely expresses the infant's feelings.

b) magical stage: the external world and the reality principle "filter through" into the undisturbed dual unity and the pleasure principle. It is in fact the gradual appearance of the external world and the reality principle that distinguishes Spielrein's autistic and magical stages, in contrast to Freud, who merges the two stages into one and considers them both a field of the pleasure principle.

developmental stages on a strictly biogenetic basis, observing the creation of meaning (cf. Spielrein, op. cit., 351., Wharton, op. cit., 293., Levelt, op. cit., 85). The teacher Ludwig Strümpell published a "stage model" strikingly akin to Spielrein's in 1880, before psychoanalysis was even born (cf. Levelt, op. cit., 100–101.; Spielrein does not mention his name).

What is the consequence of the appearing external world in terms of the development of the language and the self? The mother is not always present and hunger cannot always be satisfied. The sound increasingly recalls the action and related positive feelings. The infant soon notices, however, that merely uttering the sound and recalling suckling and the related pleasant feelings do not satisfy his or her hunger. Later he or she also realises that by repeating the sound, he or she can summon his or her mother, so the sound slowly becomes connected to the image of the mother. Thus, sound production is oriented towards the external world: it “communicates” and “calls the attention” of the external world to the fact that the infant is hungry.

c) social stage: this is the period when the infant turns towards the outside world and experiences the reality principle fully. She or he slowly learns to control his or her desires and see himself or herself through the others as well. The infant would like to understand others and communicate his or her thoughts to them (op. cit. 364., Wharton, op. cit., 302.). The communicative function of language is thus strengthened. However, Spielrein says something important about what happens to language:

“When [...] words contain not an *enforcing meaning* (*erzwingende Bedeutung*) but an *optional one* (*fakultative Bedeutung*), does that emerge which we adults generally understand as language. This is the third stage of a social language intended for fellow human beings.” (op. cit., 362., Wharton, op. cit., 301–302. Emphasis mine – K.F.).

For a long time, it was not quite clear to me what Spielrein means by *erzwingende* and *fakultative Bedeutung*. Based on her complete study and other Geneva papers, I have decided to interpret them as “emotional” and “intellectual” meaning. The emotional or enforcing (*erzwingend*) meaning characterises the autistic and the magical stages, where emotionality is the determining factor as opposed to the rationality of the social stage (see the Sterns’ theories detailed above). Approaching the question from a strictly linguistic perspective and considering that Spielrein was working in Geneva, the opposition *erzwingend-fakultativ* can also be translated as “arbitrary-non-arbitrary.”

However, Geneva also exerted its influence on Spielrein’s thinking, which was even more important than structuralist linguistics. This is where she met Piaget and their joint thinking had a crucial effect on Spielrein’s work afterwards.

This joint thinking was not only due to the fact (to which several legends were attached later) that Spielrein was Piaget’s analyst for 8 months (Vidal, 2001, 141.; Richebächer, op. cit., 230.). It is much more important that in the early 1920s, the young Piaget’s scholarly attitude was strongly influenced by his interest in psychoanalysis. This is proven not only by biographical facts (membership in various societies, such as the Swiss Society for Psychoanalysis, participation at the IPA congress in Berlin etc.) but also by his works written around this time. He said to himself that “we owe all our knowledge about the unconscious and the child’s primitive thinking mechanisms to *Freudian* psychoanalysis” (Spielrein, 1922a, 235., emphasis original – K.F.) Somewhat contrary to this statement, his psychoanalytical orientation was more attached to the Zürich than the Vienna School (Vidal, op. cit.,

143., 145.). One can detect Burghölzli's, Bleuler's and Jung's influence on his interpretation of autistic and socialised, directed and non-directed thinking, the communicability of ideas but also on his theories about dreams and fantasising and how he connected the mechanisms of these processes to children's thinking (Vidal, op. cit.). In Spielrein's case, though she remained dedicated to Freudian approaches, many aspects of her oeuvre (e.g. the interpretation of symbols) show the influence of what she learnt from Burghölzli.

The meeting of child psychology and psychoanalysis in Spielrein and (early) Piaget could be summarised by saying that for Spielrein, child psychology "taught" psychoanalysis to her, while in Piaget's case, psychoanalysis "taught" child psychology to him (cf. Vidal, op. cit., 143.). The fact that both had a biological approach must also have influenced their common interest. To return to Piaget's influence on the *Papa-mama* paper: Spielrein emphasises one aspect in connection with the transition from the magical to the social stage.

"Piaget spoke in one of his lectures [winter term 1921/1922, on autistic thought – K.F.] about the child's different attitudes to reality; according to him the child progresses from the absolute to the relative. [...] Doubt [in its omnipotence – K.F.] develops only later: when the child asks a question, it is not to clarify the real facts for itself but to get an answer it wants." (Spielrein, 1922b, 360., Wharton, op. cit., 300).

Though centring of the I (Ich-Zentrierung) is mentioned at another point of her paper (op. cit., 359., Wharton, op. cit., 299.), Spielrein does not use the terminus technicus "I-centric speech" in regard to the reference to Piaget. As for the quote above and returning to Spielrein's definition of the social stage and her opposition of *erzwingende Bedeutung-fakultative Bedeutung*: the *erzwingend-fakultativ*, the opposition could also be translated as *absolute vs. relative*.

Last but not least: Piaget's approach to child language is usually described as functional (Pléh, 2014, 12.; Vidal, op. cit., 146.). It is hard not to notice the same in Spielrein. Her three stages correspond to Bühler's three linguistic functions: the autistic stage to the expressive function, the magical stage to the expressive and conative functions, and in the social stage, these are joined by the representation function.

Interestingly, French linguist Frédéric Paulhan distinguishes between affective and intellectual linguistic functions (Pléh, 2018, 25.). Though we cannot assume a connection between them, this reminds us that Spielrein describes language acquisition as a development from the affective to the intellectual.

Conclusion

In my paper I have used the first one of Sabina Spielrein three interconnected, key papers written in Geneva, *Die Entstehung der kindlichen Worte Papa und Mama* (The Origin of the Child's Words Papa and Mama) to illustrate how she approached the

development of children's language and thinking. She based her argument on the origin and developmental history of what were assumed to be the first two speech sounds, *m* and *p*, and focused her ideas around two fundamental linguistic questions: (1) „How does it happen that in children of all races the same comparable terms for father and mother are found (papa and mama)?" (op. cit. 353., Wharton, op. cit., 295.) (2) Why is there a high likelihood that the terms "mama" and "papa" will be the first words a child utters? (op. cit.)

She examined phonetic, physiological, biological and psychological aspects within a psychoanalytical framework. She concluded that the following factors might contribute to the widespread use of the words "mama" and "papa":

- the consonants in both sound sequences are labials, which can be produced with little physiological effort;
- these labials are associated with a basic need: eating (suckling);
- the sound clusters are produced at the place where the act producing them (suckling) happens (identification of sound and act);
- they are connected to the mother's person.

Spielrein is much more uncertain about the second question: the way these sound clusters become words. A likely reason for this is that she has difficulties defining the concept of "word" (cf. op. cit., 355–356., 363., Wharton, op. cit., 296–297., 302.). Her attempts at definition show that – with a good sense of linguistics – she suggests that a sound cluster becomes a word when it achieves permanence in form (phonemic and morphemic structure [number of syllables]) and meaning, but she does not (and presumably cannot) know at which developmental stage this occurs. In connection with these two central questions, she also highlights several other problems related to the origin and development of language and arrives at a psychoanalytical interpretation of the three stages of language acquisition.

It is this study of Spielrein and her three-stage model that first show specific signs of joint thinking with Piaget on equal terms. This is later detailed in two synthesising papers of her Geneva years, *Die Zeit im unterschweligen Seelenleben* (Time in Subliminal Psychic Life) (1923a) and *Quelques analogies entre la pensée de l'enfant, celle de l'aphasique et la pensée subconsciouente* (Some Analogies between Thinking in Children, Aphasia and the Subconscious Mind) (1923b).

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